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ABSTRACT

A study investigated provision of workplace literacy courses available for women in female-dominated industries and women's access to and participation in those courses. A literature review revealed very little research on the required increased literacy skills in Australia and no previous studies on women's access to workplace literacy courses in Western Australia. Structured interviews were conducted with representatives of industries that typically employed predominantly women--union representatives, course providers, adult literacy educators, and industry management or human resources personnel. Fifteen women in the selected industries who did not participate in literacy programs were interviewed. Data were collected from hospitals, nursing homes, hotels, food industry, china manufacturers, and textile industry. Results indicated that far fewer literacy programs were available in workplaces with large numbers of women than in male-dominated workplaces. Women were very often eager to attend literacy courses provided that they were in the company's time and did not interfere with family commitments. The dropout rate was very low. Factors that contributed to women's failure to access available literacy classes were as follows: a feeling they were too old, problems with time and day of course, time management, suspicion of management, peer pressure, cultural traditions, belief they did not need the course, and lack of interest. Recommendations related to motivation and access were made. (34 references) (YLB)

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SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION
EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY

WHERE ARE THE WOMEN?

A REPORT INTO ISSUES RELATED TO WOMEN'S ACCESS TO WORKPLACE LITERACY PROGRAMS.

DR MARION MILTON

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Dr Marion Milton

School of Language Education
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April, 1996

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PREFACE

This research project was initiated after a discussion with Mr Geoff Pearson, from the Workplace Education Unit at Central Metropolitan College of TAFE, Perth, Western Australia. Geoff Pearson, along with Barry Strickland had completed a major national study into good practice in Australian workplace literacy courses. One of the factors they noted was that there were very few women in the cases studied. It was not clear from their research, whether the absence of women was only an outcome of the particular, male dominated workplaces chosen for their study, whether there was little course provision for women, or whether women tended not to access available courses. Pearson suggested that this area may be worthy of further investigation. As this aligned with two areas of my own interest, workplace literacy courses and women's issues, a grant allocation was sought to enable a small scale study to be undertaken.

WHERE ARE THE WOMEN?

A REPORT INTO ISSUES RELATED TO WOMEN'S ACCESS TO WORKPLACE LITERACY PROGRAMS.

Introduction

This study sought to investigate the provision of workplace literacy courses available for women in female dominated industries, and women's access to and participation in those courses. Further, it was intended to interview women who had dropped out or not accessed available courses.

Prior to discussing the study, it seems appropriate to locate it within the current economic, social and political climate of the Australian workplace, with a particular focus on the increasing demand for literacy skills.

Current Perspectives in Australian Industry

Women make up 33% of the full time Australian workforce and 75% of the part time workforce, which equates to 43% of the total workforce, according to the most recent figures released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (May, 1995). Further, 39.5% of all women over the age of 18 are working. Even though women play an important part in the workforce there is a question as to whether their needs for training are being met.

The Australian workplace is changing in response to the need to remain competitive in the international market, increasing quality standards, economic rationalism and overseas trends. These factors have, in turn, influenced government policies in the area. Industry restructuring, enterprise bargaining and multiskilling are occurring across the country. Many companies are committed to the notion of Total Quality Management, which gives workers ownership and responsibility for a whole process or product, where previously they only required specific skills for an isolated part. This has meant the need for massive retraining of workers. Allied to

these changes, are changes to management structures such that workers become self directed through working in teams. Workplace teams hold meetings to report on productivity issues, write reports, record minutes and submit budgets, activities which are often outside the literacy skills of some employees.

In referring to changes in the Australian workplace, Joyce, Scheeres and Slade (1993, p1) state that "All these changes have led to increased language demands being placed upon employees at all levels of the workplace".

In an earlier study of *Literacy for Productivity*, the authors noted (Donald & Long, 1989, p74) that literacy and numeracy skills are required by the bulk of the Australian workforce and that "a workforce which contains too many people with inadequate literacy and numeracy skills would be less adaptable and less productive". The authors concluded that a literate workforce is more flexible and able to fit in with changing productivity measures and would be more adaptable for the multiskilling that goes with award restructuring (p75).

In a study that investigated the literacy demands of the workplaces at different levels of occupation, Morris and Brown (1990) found that the study supported the concept of different kinds of literacies. They noted that in four different places surveyed, the majority of tasks involved document literacy, that is, being able to read and fill in forms. They also noted that "people needed to increase their literacy skills in order to be able to move up a career path, or as they became multiskilled" (12).

Numerous Government funded reports (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Brisbane, 1992; Baker & Wooden, 1989; Jamrozic, Boland & Stewart, 1991; Labour Market Research Centre, WA, 1993; Rado & D'Cruz, 1994; Roberts, 1984; Stromback & Preston, 1991) have been produced on immigration, language classes for immigrants, labour market trends, industry restructuring and the cost of poor English proficiency to the workplace. These reports highlight the added difficulties, in the current climate, for workers from non-English speaking backgrounds. For example:

> Poor language skills may not have a substantial effect on a person's productivity in a particular job, but make it difficult to acquire

further skills to improve that productivity (Stromback & Preston, 1991, p6).

This situation exists because training occurs in English and people without the required oral and written skills in English, are often unable to take advantage of that training. In fact Baker and Wooden (1989) noted that NESB workers received less workplace training than other workers and that NESB women received the least. In an earlier report on immigrant women in the South Australian workforce (Roberts, 1984) it was noted that NESB women received less external, in-house and on the job training than Australian born and overseas born women from English speaking backgrounds. It was further noted that poor English proficiency may act as a barrier to training.

Concerns for women and for their families were also expressed in a working paper on industry restructuring and its effects on the occupational welfare of immigrants (Jamrozic, Boland & Stewart, 1991). They state:

> In economic and social terms industry restructuring as a whole creates winners and losers (p77).... Thus, in relative and often in absolute terms, people engaged in manual low-skilled occupations have been the losers of the change (p 78).
> Many of these immigrant workers are found in the public sector, employed in various maintenance jobs such as cleaning, catering, gardening or laundry services. Predominantly female, low-paid, these workers may be called invisible people in public places. .....
> They are non-militant, generally reasonable content in their work, with no great expectations of higher pay, career structure or fringe benefits. .....
> Any reduction of the labour force means that some people will find another job and others will rely on unemployment benefits for income support. However, many people employed in these jobs are married women and if they lose jobs and cannot find new jobs the loss of income has to be carried by their families. This is one of the potentially negative outcomes of industry restructuring which is not

> immediately evident but serious for the people who may be affected and for their families (pp86-87).

From the above studies it has emerged that the level of skills in English is an important factor in an NESB worker's ability to cope and adapt to changes in the workplace. In a study that assessed the literacy skills and workplace literacy demands of NESB unskilled workers, Burke (1993) tested 46 workers in five worksites. While the workers scored more highly than anticipated on the measures of oral language and reading used, writing levels were low. Further, the measures used were not workplace specific, so did not include the technical jargon used in each workplace. When he examined the literacy tasks required of these workers in each workplace and compared them to their literacy skill levels, Burke found likely mismatches of 46% on reading tasks and 56% on writing tasks (p42).

In a study of language and literacy in the textile and clothing industry (Baylis, Caldwell & Nussbaum, 1991, p 1) it was noted that "language and literacy problems were reported to occur at all levels of the workplace". They further noted that low literacy levels hindered on the job training, off the job formal training, group participation in committees and the introduction of new technology and new production methods.

In 1990, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) made a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee into *Literacy Needs in the Workplace*. In the submission it was stated that low literacy could be costing Australia up to $6.5 billion per year. It was further stated that up to 600,000 people work below their skill or qualification level and are held back by inadequate English language or literacy skills. Further, the problem was not confined to those from non English speaking backgrounds. Of those from English speaking backgrounds, the committee found that of those surveyed, 49% did not understand meal surcharges and 68% could not answer questions on technological issues. The committee noted that the problem was compounded by a failure to provide workers with opportunities to develop literacy skills. Martin Ferguson, then President of the ACTU said:

> One in seven Australian workers can't read and write adequately. That makes literacy and numeracy an industrial issue. Access to

> basic literacy, numeracy and English language training is vital to all workers. The ACTU Executive believes on the job training is a right, without loss of pay. This should be recognised in all award restructuring negotiations.
>
> (An Equal Chance-DEET Publication, 1990, p3)

The cost of low levels of English proficiency amongst immigrants in the workforce has been recognised for some time. Jamrozic, Boland & Stewart, (1991) noted the vulnerability of NESB workers (p29), the low skilled jobs of NESB women (p30) and the need for better provision of English classes in the workplace (p74).

The Australian Government's Language and Literacy Policy released in 1991 highlighted Adult Literacy as an area of high priority. The first goal of that policy is:

> All Australian residents should develop and maintain a level of spoken and written English which is appropriate for a range of contexts with the support of education and training programs addressing their diverse learning needs. (DEET, 1991).

The ALLP definition of literacy follows:

> Literacy is the ability to read and use written information and to write appropriately, in a range of contexts. It is used to develop knowledge and understanding, to achieve personal growth and to function effectively in our society. Literacy also includes the recognition of numbers and basic mathematical signs and symbols within text.
>
> Literacy involves the integration of speaking, listening, and critical thinking within reading and writing. Effective literacy is intrinsically purposeful, flexible and dynamic and continues to develop throughout an individual's lifetime (DEET, 1991).

Although there was prior government policy under which English classes in the workplace were held, the new policy, in International Literacy Year brought the need for such courses to public attention. The policy was then backed up with the provision of funding to ensure such training took place.

In the same year, the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) with the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs (DIEA), in consultation with the Department of Industrial Relations, set up the national Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) programs for workers with poor English language and literacy skills. The establishment of this central funding body aimed to consolidate and provide some consistency to what had often been ad hoc funding of programs in the past.

In Western Australia in the 1980s, State Government Policy on English classes in the workplace ensured that many NESB workers received such courses. According to Michael Kooperman formerly of Industry Education Services (IES), State Policy along with a similar Federal Policy and the Equal Opportunity Policy provided the means for IES to access many worksites and provide English classes. There was a flow on from these policies into the award system so that under many awards a certain number of hours had to be spent on English in the workplace. In Kooperman's view, participation by women, in English in the workplace courses, was higher in the 80s than in the 90s. In the early 90s, under industry restructuring and downsizing many people lost their jobs. These were often the low and semi-skilled workers, many of whom were women (personal communication, 1996).

It has been established that many workers, from both English and non-English speaking backgrounds, need further literacy training and programs. State bodies and literacy providers such as TAFE (Technical and Further Education), and AMES (Adult Migrant English Service) in each state under the federal Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP) are offering workplace literacy programs to address these needs.

Several of the previously mentioned reports indicated the need for language and literacy training to be comparable across sites, so that training and prior learning can be recognised when people move to other workplaces. A National Framework of Adult Literacy and Numeracy (Coates, 1994), which follows competency based principles, has been developed as a guide to curriculum development and assessment. However, it has yet to be implemented in any wide scale way in Western Australia. A note of caution can be taken from a study of language audits and industry restructuring (Mawer, 1991). This study found that demands for workers to "read,

interpret and write complex, abstract English texts" related to their job, may be far greater than the demands of the job itself, and that under the competency based system, it would necessary to read, write and pass tests to do the same job that the worker may have been doing competently for years.

> The competency-based approach is to a great extent industry-driven, with the aim of developing more performance-oriented, effective and fairer assessment and training methodologies. However, it is not difficult to see how the actual implementation process could become a significant gatekeeping exercise (Mawer, p21).

A recently released report on the benefits of the National Training Reform Agenda on NESB women (Bertone, 1995) found that uneven progress had been made. The National Training Reform Agenda is the term used to encompass all the strategies the government has put in place to expand and reform the training system in Australia, including the competency-based system. Bertone noted that most of the training NESB women had undertaken was narrow, task and enterprise specific and unaccredited (p68). This was reflected in the title of the report *Training for What?* Bertone indicated that there was a need for recognition of prior learning (RPL); a need for integrated work training with language and literacy training; training to be in worktime; and the need for further data collection on NESB women's participation in workplace training (p69-73).

Women's Access to Literacy Courses

Research into different types of literacy programs in a variety of contexts have been documented for some time. A Nationwide DEET funded project (Pearson & Strickland, 1993) presented case studies of good practice in workplace literacy. Providers of workplace literacy courses were contacted and asked to nominate examples of good practice, and to indicate why they considered these to be good examples. Of the 68 workplaces nominated by providers and surveyed by the researchers, only 4% specifically targeted women, as compared with 38% specifically for men. The six programs they identified as targeting women comprised two for cleaners in hospitals, two for cleaning contractors and two in the food-processing industry. All industries which traditionally have a higher proportion of female workers.

There was a high proportion of male dominated industries in the workplaces investigated in that research. It seems that the low provision of programs for women may have been due to the industries covered in the study. There appeared to be a need for a more thorough investigation of female dominated industries.

Low participation of women in literacy programs is another factor identified by Pearson and Strickland. Of the programs which were available to both men and women, women were grossly under-represented. Once again, this could be related to the type of industries represented, or there could be numerous other factors involved such as when training occurs outside of work hours. There was a need to discover why numbers of women do not access literacy courses when they are available.

In a large Canadian study (Peirce, Harper & Barnaby, 1992) of workplace literacy program non-attendance by ethnic women, it was found that lack of knowledge about the program and about their rights to attend were major factors. It appears that where there are large of numbers of women who are not fluent in English particular reasons for non-attendance emerge. These reasons may not apply to women from English speaking backgrounds or when smaller numbers of women are involved.

In a study of the literacy needs of Australian-resident Turkish women, a high drop out rate was found from *community* literacy classes. A variety of reasons were given for non attendance, some of which were related to the course being in the women's own time and transport problems (Mudaly, 1992). These factors may not apply to *workplace* literacy programs that operate on site in company time. Other factors identified included age and family commitments which could also apply in workplace settings.

A study of the workplace basic education program at the Nestles plant in Tongala, NSW (Humphrey, 1991, p72) found, among other things, that although equality of access was an issued raised by many of the people interviewed, the author stated that "There was no evidence in the evaluation that women found it difficult to participate in the Tongala program". The author did further note the concerns of the Trades and Labour Council representative, however, in the following quote:

> Women may need special courses that address the social and cultural attitudes that reinforce their secondary positions in many factories in the country. For example in one large factory, women who are on the permanent staff are denied overtime opportunities because both management and shop stewards believe that men are the bread winners. (p73).

Other Australian studies of women in literacy programs, have tended to focus either on describing the program (Murray, 1990; Thorsen, Thorsen, Nichol & Prain, 1993), or on describing how women can take control of their lives through formal literacy classes (Bee, 1988; Mackeracher,1989). Few Australian studies have investigated specific factors related to women's access to workplace literacy.

A number of recent studies and government reports have investigated issues related to training or award restructuring and benefits for immigrant women (Alorsco & Harrison, 1993; Bertone, 1995; Stephens & Bertone, 1995; Yeatman, 1992). These reports indicate the relative lack of workplace training for NESB women and the need for appropriate and useful English language courses within the workplace.

Research into older migrant women and language learning, Griffith (1990), investigated women who were no longer in the workforce, but who were accessing community language and literacy courses. These women had resided in Australia for a significant part of their lives, had been employed in factories, and yet had failed to learn adequate English for participation in the broader Australian society. While Griffith's study did not investigate workplace literacy, it does throw some light onto why older ethnic women, who have lived here a long time, have not developed good English language skills. She notes that many migrants who arrived in the 50s and 60s spent most of their time working long hours in factories. They often lived and worked with others from their own ethnic group and had little opportunity to interact with English speakers. While this situation was the same for male and female migrants, women were even less likely to acquire English. Many married and had children at a very young age, and through cultural and society expectations were tied to the home for many years. When women did go to work they were also still expected to fulfil all the

household duties and child rearing. This meant that women had no time available to participate in life outside of the home and their own ethnic community.

Griffith notes that these women were often unaware that language classes were available when they first came here, and those who knew about classes were unable to attend "for reasons associated with their gender, in particular the vulnerability and subservience of young women" (p43). Griffith noted that a negative attitude on the husband's part towards his wife improving her English skills was expressed as still existing, by some of the older women.

This sort of attitude often reflects the cultural background of the respondents. Cultural barriers to women's accessing of community literacy classes have been noted elsewhere, and in some instances have lead to a call for women's only classes (Clarke, 1989).

The Western Australia State Settlement Plan (1995) indicates that ethnic women still face such barriers. In a statement on women's issues it is noted that:

> ...the characteristics of migrant/refugee women mean that they experience greater access difficulties than migrant/refugee men. Should they be from a traditionally male dominated culture, it is unlikely that they will ever participate fully in Australian society. (p19)

In a further section on employment and training, it is noted that "the employment related needs of NESB women are different from those of ESB women" (p19). The issues for NESB women included "unequal employment opportunity, access to English language proficiency and access to training and re-training" (Western Australian State Settlement Plan, 1995, p19).

A recent study by MacDonald (1993), investigated the literacy barriers to employment of unemployed women, and literacy barriers to job promotion and training. The study aimed to identify policies to reduce the barriers. The study was undertaken in Victoria in 1991-92 and based on the result of

nine group discussions with women, as well as consultation with workers in the field. This study noted that many of the "priority" industries identified for WELL funding were male dominated. Lack of commitment by some employers to ESL literacy programs and the cost in terms of lost production were identified as other reasons for low provision for women. However, whether the latter reasons are specific to female dominated industries is unclear. Women cited family commitments and peer resentment as the main reasons for non-attendance. As the part of this study related to access to workplace literacy courses was based on interviews with 9 NESB women from two companies, in one state, further research is necessary to find whether similar factors occur in other industries and other states.

A West Australian joint DEET and ALLP project was conducted into the barriers facing adults who could benefit from literacy classes (Enhancing Participation in Adult Literacy, DEET, 1992). While this project (known as the "Barriers Project") did not investigate workplace literacy, there was a chapter devoted to literacy and women. Some of the findings may be applicable to this investigation. It was found that the barriers to participation in community literacy classes for women are "diverse and numerous". Of those, some that might apply in workplaces are: low self esteem; past negative learning experiences; family problems, such as lack of support for their learning at home; family commitments, such as picking up children from school or child care; and time constraints, such as the time when the course is run (pp 47-53). This final factor would only apply to the present study if the course was not run wholly in work time.

The literature reviewed above gives a brief indication of the changes going on in Australian workplaces which require increased literacy skills from workers; the changes to Policy and funding programs; and the issues emerging from the research into women's access to literacy classes. There is very little available research into this topic in Australia, and no previous studies have been published on women's access to workplace literacy courses in Western Australia. Therefore, this research aimed to investigate access to literacy training in workplaces that were female dominated or had areas that were staffed mainly by female workers.

Aims of the Investigation

The aims of this study are to investigate the issues related to participation of women in several workplace literacy programs in Western Australia. In particular this research aimed to:

1. Assess the availability of literacy/communication skills programs to women in selected industries which are typically female-dominated.

2. Ascertain whether women are accessing programs when they are available.

3. Uncover the factors which are related to non participation of women in specific industries where programs are available.

4. Analyse the issues related to non participation to determine whether factors are of a common general nature, workplace specific, language or culturally based or idiosyncratic.

Significance

The research proposed to:

* Address an area identified as needing further elaboration by building on the recent DEET funded National project of Pearson and Strickland (1993) and the Victorian study by MacDonald (1993) which identified the low provision for, and participation of women in workplace literacy programs.

* Establish the extent of provision of workplace literacy programs in workplaces with large numbers of female unskilled or semiskilled workers.

* Provide an insight into reasons for non-participation in workplace literacy programs in a few female-dominated industries in Western Australia.

Research Methods

A qualitative research design was used in this investigation. First, statistical information on employment areas with large concentrations of women were sought. Then, a range of industries which typically employ a predominance of women, were contacted. Structured interviews were conducted with representatives who were willing to participate. From this initial data, worksites from a selected range of industries were chosen. Key informants were interviewed, using a semi structured interview format. Key informants included Union representatives, course providers, adult literacy educators and industry management or Human Resources personnel. Case studies in some female-dominated industries were also included. Interview/discussions were held with 15 literacy program non-participant women in the selected industries. Interviews were taped for later analysis. When women are not fluent English speakers, either a work colleague translated for them, or a fluent spokesperson was interviewed.

Literacy teachers from several workplaces were interviewed individually to ascertain details about the program, such as whether it operates in or out of worktime, how participants are selected, and numbers of attendees. Teachers' views on reasons for non-participation were also sought.

While the past research cited above indicated some possible reasons for non-participation, other themes emerged during the data collection. A list of these factors was made, and each interview was coded according to whether the factor was discussed, and the importance given to it by the respondent was noted. Thus the data from interviews tended to fall into particular categorisations.

Through this coding and categorisation, analysis of the transcripts of discussions and interviews was enabled to reveal the issues and factors related to non-participation in literacy programs.

Outcomes

Initially, the study provides some evidence of the relative lack of workplace literacy programs that are available for women in the Perth Metropolitan area.

The research also provides insights into why some women don't take advantage of literacy training when it is provided in their workplace. Factors related to cultural background, are discussed as they impact on other commonly given reasons.

It is also hoped that the study will provide information to management and literacy providers, related to barriers to participation, which may be factors to consider when designing policy and planning programs. Further, it is hoped that the study will provide useful data that women may use in negotiation of workplace agreements in relation to training.

Limitations

While several of the factors related to non-participation of women in workplace literacy programs could apply equally to men, this study did not investigate the male perspective. Nor did it attempt to determine which factors might only apply to women. The reason this study focussed on the female perspective was the apparent lack of women in programs cited in past research and the apparent lack of programs available for women.

A further limitation of this research is that no attempt was made to investigate the content or methodology of workplace literacy programs in order to determine whether what is offered is appropriate to women's needs and whether the teaching methodology is supportive of women's learning. This study was seminal in its intent and the above factors, along with any findings which emerge may provide grounds for further exploration.

A number of workplace literacy courses with female participants, had just begun at the time of data collection, and as there had been no dropouts at that stage, they were not included. There were also a number of workplaces that did have non-participants and dropouts, but because they were going through workplace agreement negotiations, I was not allowed access to those women.

Finally, although I interviewed a number of providers, teachers and people in unions, management and human resources, I spoke to a relatively small

number of women. Therefore, some of the findings of this study may not be generalisable to the wider population of unskilled/semiskilled females in the workforce.

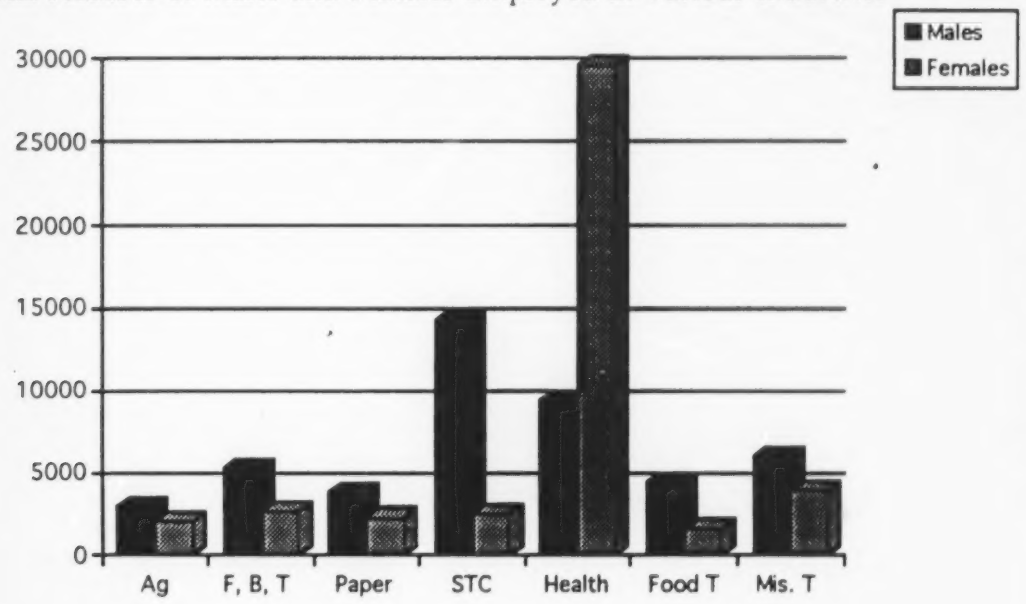
Finding the women

The first task to undertake in this study was to determine where large concentrations of women are employed. While it is common knowledge that hospitals and the textile trade are two such workplaces, information about other sites was necessary. Course providers gave information on their courses, and further information was sought direct from industries.

The following table was compiled from the latest information available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). It indicates the workplaces that have the largest numbers of women in Western Australia. The numbers of men also working in those industries is included for comparison purposes. Other industries with lower concentrations of women (typically with high numbers of men) have been left out of the table for ease of reading. While it is acknowledged that this exclusion may in fact ignore some workplaces within the excluded industries, that do have a number of women, this is preferable to the alternative, which is to present all of the data from the relevant ABS tables. Further, as the focus of the study is on workplaces with large numbers of women, the exclusion seemed appropriate.

As can been seen from Figure 1, most women work in the Health industry. However, this figure includes all women, and for the purpose of this study, the area of interest is women who may need English language or literacy training in order to increase their work related functions. Therefore Figure 2 presents a breakdown of the numbers of females in industries with high concentrations of women, at the lower levels of occupations.

Total Number of Males and Females Employed in Various Industries



Type of Industry

Key to Type of Industry

Ag	Agriculture
F, B, T	Food, Beverages, Tobacco
Paper	Paper, Printing, Publishing
STC	Special Trade Construction
Health	Health
Food T	Food Tradespersons
Mis. T	Miscellaneous Tradespersons

Figure 1: W.A. Industries with high concentrations of women (from data in ABS Catalogue No. 2722.5)

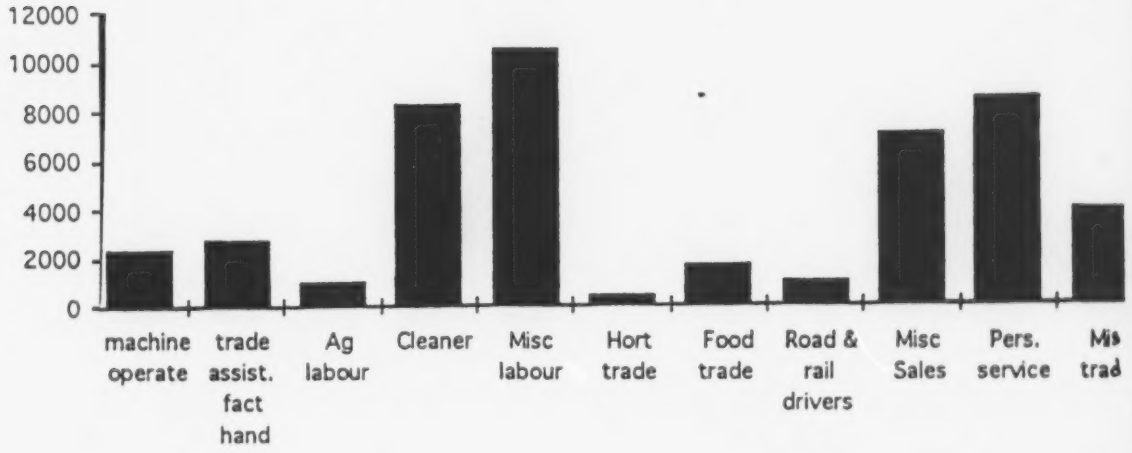


Figure 2: Women in unskilled/semiskilled occupations - selected industries (from data in ABS Catalogue No. 2722.5)

Figure 2 shows that large numbers of women work as cleaners and miscellaneous labourers and tradespeople. Although there are also a large number of women who are salespeople and personal service workers, these occupations may include many workers with good literacy skills.

There may also be many other women identified above who have good language and literacy skills. There are, however, also very many women who work in those jobs because they do not have the language or literacy levels required for other occupations. Some even find it a struggle to cope with the literacy demands of their current occupation. These people are the prospective clients for workplace literacy courses. However, many women are employed on a part time basis. Part time workers are usually denied access to literacy training.

The above statistical information shows the numbers of the female workforce in Western Australia in unskilled or semiskilled occupations. Although many women may work on a part time basis, full time work at these jobs frequently involve long hours and low pay. In the past it was somtimes possible to earn higher pay in these jobs, by working overtime, which meant that women would often put up with long hours of tedious,

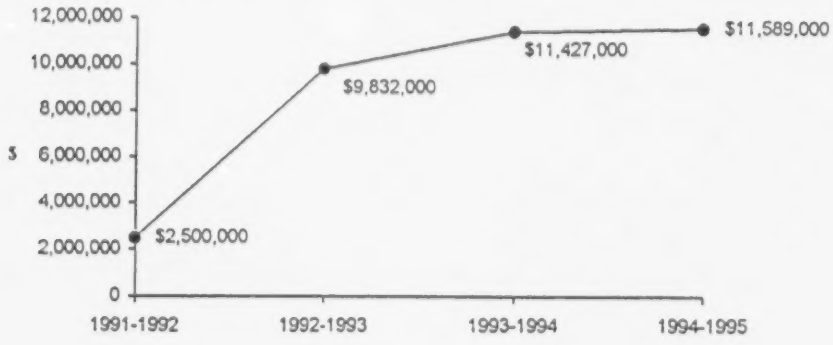
repetitive work in order to gain added financial benefits. With the current workplace changes that, in some instances, include flexible working hours and the abolition of overtime as such, these unskilled or semiskilled jobs may have less appeal. Unfortunately, it is often the women with poor English and low literacy skills who have little choice in occupation, who will be further disadvantaged by the current changes.

Background Information on Funding and Courses available in WA

The Federal government Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) funds many workplace literacy courses through WELL and FILLIP programs. Since the budget cuts in mid 1996, the FILLIP program has become defunct. However, as several of the workplaces used in this research received funds under either or both of these programs, it is pertinent to present some of the details of program funding and the distribution of those funds on a state by state basis.

WELL (Workplace English Language and Literacy) Program:

In the 1994-95 period $11.5 million of Federal funding was allocated to workplace literacy programs. The amount of funding has increased dramatically over the last five years, reflecting government priority in this area (see Figure 3 from Baylis, 1995, p13). The 1991-2 figure represents the workplace literacy program only. English in the workplace was not funded through WELL during the first year of operation.



Total Funding Levels for 1991-1992, 1992-1993, 1993-1994 and 1994-1995

Figure 3 WELL funding of workplace literacy programs 1991-95.

In the current funding period, $3.8 million was for ESL training and $7.62 million for literacy training The program is managed by DEETYA in consultation with the Departments of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs (DIEA) and Industrial Relations (DIR).

The program aims to :

* enable workers to develop literacy and ESL skills that are sufficient to enable them to remain in their current employment and to meet their future employment and training needs.

* enable workplaces to support changes in industrial arrangements associated with award restructuring and industry and workplace reforms.

WELL program funding is mainly aimed at private workplaces but Government Business Enterprises are also eligible. The WELL program targets workers whose literacy and English proficiency is below the Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ASLPR) 3 or equivalent.

ASLPR 3 is the proficiency level where a non-English speaking background person is able to communicate in English with sufficient accuracy to meet basic vocational need.

Tripartite negotiations between the employers, unions and providers and agreements are needed before delivery of WELL programs. All programs must recognise access and equity principles and encourage all those workers who need training to participate on a voluntary basis. (WELL information package, DEET, 1994). Further, DEET encourages companies, to run training within working hours. However, the reality is that most courses run partly in work time and partly in the worker's own time.

Since 1992, over 2000 companies have taken part in the WELL program Australia-wide and over 65,000 workers have participated in training. (*Literacy Update*, DEET publication, 1994).

The WELL funds are distributed Australia-wide with the bulk going to Victoria and NSW. Figure 4 shows that only 6% of funds were spent in WA in 1994.

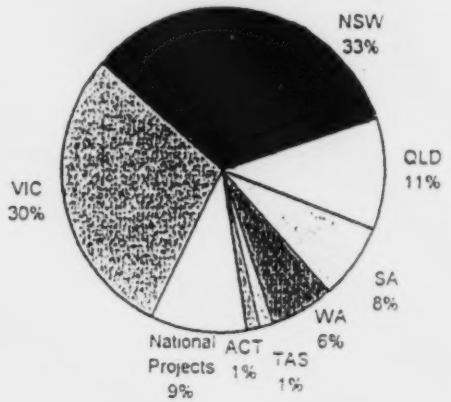


Figure 4: Distribution of WELL Program Funds for 1994
(Baylis, 1995, p14)

In 1994, under DEET's WELL funding there were four National projects: The National Automotive Industry Training Board, the National Food Industry Training Council, the Australian Textile Clothing and Footwear Industry Training Board and the National Building Training Board (*Literacy Update*, DEET, 1994). Two of these are for mainly male dominated industries. The project in the Textile industry, which is usually female dominated, aimed to raise awareness in the industry of the need for workplace language and literacy training. Further, in 1993-94, priority industries were targeted by the WELL program. The priorities were set where a need was identified to enable workers to take part in workplace and industry reform. The Food industry was one of those targeted and the highest number of projects (24) were funded in 1994 in that industry. Special funding was also provided under FILLIP.

FILLIP (Food Industry Language and Literacy Initiative) Program:

Offered workplace English language and literacy courses to workplaces within the food industry is managed by the Department of Industry, Science and Technology, and was closely coordinated with the WELL program. Fillip funding was provided as a special supplement to WELL funding received by the Food industry, in order to further encourage the adoption and support of reform agendas within the industry.

While most literacy courses operated within the workplace were funded under the previous programs other programs do operate. On occasion, individual workplaces set up and run their own programs, often because they have seen the benefit of previously run WELL programs, but they wanted to have more control over the program so decided to run it themselves, or they may have missed out on funding, but were still committed to the program. On occasion employers also release workers or support them to attend community based literacy programs when they feel that it is needed and they don't have sufficient numbers or the place to run a course on site.

Data Collection

After determining which industries were most likely to be female dominated (based on the information supplied by the Bureau of Statistics and known course providers), I conducted a large number of initial telephone interviews with representatives of businesses and hospitals who were in female dominated workplaces.

After being given brief details about the research study, informants were asked about the makeup of the workforce and whether any literacy courses had been run in 1994 or 95. The Training Guarantee Act, which had ensured that all large workplaces had to spend at least 1% of their income on training, had lapsed by 1994. This meant that workplaces were no longer required to provide training. It seemed appropriate, therefore to limit my data collection to training that had been provided in 1994 and up to mid 1995 when the data collection period ceased.

As hospitals employ a large number of females, particularly in the cleaning and food preparation areas, my first enquires were to the major hospitals. I found that even though hospitals are the largest employers of women there were very few programs operating in those years. One major hospital contacted had run programs in 1995 and a representative and the teacher were interviewed.

Of the other industries and businesses contacted, the food industry had the majority of programs, mainly because of the availability of FILLIP and WELL funding. These along with other industries contacted are listed below, along with the outcomes of the telephone enquiries.

Results of Initial Phone Interviews

Hospitals:

St John of God Hospital. I spoke to the Support Services Manager from Human Resources, who indicated that a literacy program had run once in the past, under contract to an outside body. He said that nothing was ongoing or planned for the future.

Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital. I spoke to a representative from the Workplace Development Unit, who indicated that they had no such programs in 1994 or 1995, and she did not know if any had run in the past.

Princess Margaret Hospital. I spoke to a representative from Human Resources, who indicated that although some courses had run in the past there was nothing at the moment and nothing likely in the near future.

Royal Perth Hospital. I spoke to Arleen Quinn from Human Resources, who indicated that a number of courses had run over the years, and that she would be prepared to give me further information. Some of this is included later in this report.

It should be noted that due to industrial unrest caused by enterprise bargaining, economic downturn, outsourcing and privatisation of many areas of work, many courses did not run in 1995. (e.g., At RPH, WELL funding was gained in 1995, but due to industrial unrest problems they were unable to fulfil the WELL formula (tripartite agreement) and the course couldn't run.)

The courses that had run earlier on had been arranged to span the change of shift timeslot, so that workers either stayed late, or came to work early to take part. Arleen Quinn indicated that all women in the low skilled jobs

(cleaners, kitchen staff etc) had had the opportunity to take workplace literacy classes over the years, and most had availed themselves of it at some time. She also indicated that the drop outs and non-participants in recent courses did not attend as they felt they were too old. RPH has had a fairly stable employment history with many women staying long periods. A number of these women were close to retirement and had indicated that they thought further literacy classes a waste of time.

Fremantle Hospital I was unable to speak to anyone at the hospital about past courses, but Diana Henderson from Fremantle TAFE, who runs workplace literacy classes in the area, indicated that although courses have operated in the past at Fremantle Hospital, nothing has been run in the last few years.

Overall, I found that even though hospitals are the largest employers of women there were very few programs operating in the years 1994-95. Most hospitals had had literacy programs in the past, often 8-10 years ago, but for various reasons had decided not to pursue them further. An unpublished report of a survey of the English language and literacy training needs of NESB workers at three major Perth hospitals (Vujcic, 1993 p 9), noted that:

> The present practice of providing English classes only for NESB is causing these workers considerable hardship in the workplace. NESB workers know that they are marginalised and that a lack of language skills is perceived in the workplace as indicating a lack of intelligence.

This report showed that although the majority of those surveyed indicated that they would take further training courses to help with their job, to help their career and to learn more English, there was also a large percentage of workers who indicated that they had no need of further English courses.

Aged Homes:

Uniting Church Aged Homes Spokesman David Parker indicated that carers were having problems with documentation, so WELL funding was obtained to run courses for employees in three hostels, following a literacy audit. He

indicated that integrated literacy and Occupational Health and Safety Programs have been run in these workplaces for cleaners, food preparation staff and carers. He indicated that participation rates were good for eligible recipients. For example, at St David's hostel there was 100% participation of those whose wanted to do the course. I interviewed two women from another Uniting Church home who opted not to access courses when they were available. These interviews are reported later.

Church of Christ Homes have run some courses, but employ mostly women from English speaking backgrounds, so only have a few workers who come within the WELL funding guidelines. In the last course two women withdrew, one because of ill health and one due to bereavement.

Hotels:

A number of major hotels in Perth were contacted and although all run training of various kinds, (e.g., food and beverage, handling guests, stress management), most did not run basic literacy courses. The **Sheraton** *was* operating a course (through the Industry Education Service) to upgrade literacy and report writing skills of 35 employees, who were mostly women. At the time of writing, there had been no dropouts. At **Burswood Casino** a perceived need was noted with NESB workers in the kitchens, but they received on-the-job kitchen training rather than specific literacy training. At the time of writing none of the hotel representatives were prepared to be interviewed further.

Food Industry:

Smiths Snack Foods has run courses under FILLIP and WELL and will run future courses, as there are 30 NESB staff. They only had one woman on the last course.

Kailis (Fish processing) has run courses. In 1994, 5% of employees accessed programs. There were no programs planned for 1995 and they were not interested in being involved further in the research.

Sealanes had run computer skills and telephone selling skills courses, but cost factors prohibited more wide scale training.

Coca cola have run courses but this workplace has more men than women. Three women attended the last workplace literacy course. One left because of pregnancy and one left because she went on leave. They were not willing to be involved further in the study as enterprise agreements were being negotiated.

Steggles (chicken processing) have a workforce that is around 70% female. They had 100 female employees at the time of data collection. They received Fillip funding for 45 to go on the course in 1995, then it was increased to cater for larger numbers. Sixty two women enquired about the course and 62 attended the course which was run twice a week in company time. At the end of the data collection stage, there had been no dropouts.

Inghams (chicken processing) Information given by a representative of the company indicated that there were no courses in 1994 or 95, but that they have run integrated literacy/health and safety courses in the past. Most people at Inghams speak English, although they do have some NESB people. They employ about 50 people, of whom 90% are unskilled, and 70% are female. Literacy training in the past catered for 6-8 women at a time. Women predominantly accessed the training after hours from 4.30 - 6.30pm, once per week. Inghams supplied me with the report on the final course run in the first half of 1991. Only four Chinese women accessed that course and the focus was mainly to improve oral communication skills. Even though some of the women indicated in post course feedback that they would also like to continue classes to improve written skills, no further course was mounted by management due to "the poor response by those eligible to attend the class" (Teacher's final report, 1991, p5). It was noted in the report that the women felt that having class after work hours made it a long tiring day and acted as a deterrent to those who could benefit.

Industry Education Services gave me access to a report, titled *Something to Crow About*, compiled by one of their teachers (Simpson, 1993), on the integrated literacy and health and safety courses that had run at Inghams from 1989 to 1991. This report indicated that three major factors were involved in determining the success of the course. The first was the time that the course ran. A morning time slot in working hours was best for participants but "most disruptive to the workplace" (p10). Comments about the after hours timeslot are as reported earlier.

Empathy of the teacher with the "needs and pressures of NESB employees in a workplace such as Inghams" (p10) was the second factor. The negative impact of one unsuccessful teacher was mentioned as influencing both recipients' and management's perceptions of courses.
The final factor was that authentic workplace material had to be used to ensure that participants saw that "the content was relevant and practical to their lives" (p10).

Masters, Peters and Brownes Dairies All have run courses in the past and some courses were running in 1995, as they have large numbers of NESB workers. Although they employ more males than females, they do have numbers of women concentrated in particular sections (e.g., packing). Masters has been interviewed further and excerpts from an interview with two course drop outs from one dairy is included later.

Dorsogna, Golden Egg and Homestyle Vegetables had all just initiated new programs at the time of data collection and had not had drop outs at that stage. Dorsogna and Golden Egg participants were mainly women. Homestyle is a small company, with a few people of each gender taking the course.

Various Industries:
Numerous flower nurseries were contacted as they employ numbers of women, however, none of those contacted had run or were considering running courses, as they felt that employees only needed practical skills, and that those few who required literacy skills already had them. A similar response was gained from pet food manufacturers and distributors.

Australian Fine China I spoke to the Manager, who indicated that English language courses had been held 8 or 9 years ago when the workforce was mainly Vietnamese women. He indicated that there was quite a high turnover and that the workforce of 75 women, was now mostly Macedonian. This current workforce all spoke good English, and as the work on the production line was of an unskilled to semiskilled nature, the women did not need writing skills. He said that when the company had a

job requiring literacy skills, they requested it at the time of the initial appointment.

Textile Industry

This industry often employs women on a part time, casual and piece-meal or outplacement basis. Employers usually only provide training for full time permanent employees, so women employed in this area often do not have the opportunity to undertake workplace training. Several companies I contacted indicated that this was the case. Also, there was little need seen for increasing literacy skills. Geoff Pearson from the Workplace Education Unit at Central Metropolitan College of TAFE (CMC) indicated that one course for TCF outworkers had been run in recent times. He indicated that it had taken more than 6 months to find a class and that the major inhibiting factor was time. As workers were paid on output, time meant money. Female workers also had family commitments which impinged on their time. I also spoke to Di McAtee from the Union who agreed to an interview which is reported later.

Jolie Babywear Manufacturer I spoke to the manager, who said that most of the women operating the sewing machines in the factory came from non-English speaking backgrounds, as she herself did, but all had competent oral skills and that that was all that was necessary in their workplace.

Results of Structured Interviews with Specific Workplaces

After the initial phone interviews, I conducted more indepth interviews with representatives from workplaces that had run recent courses, and had indicated a willingness to be interviewed further. Similar interviews were conducted with trade union training councils, when specific workplaces that had run courses were unwilling to participate in the study or could not be found.

As an indication of the sort of information sought in the interview the first two questions are inserted below.

1. In 1994, how many literacy/English in the workplace programs operated in your workplace?

2. Give a brief description of each program (e.g., integrated Health and Safety; ESL).

2a). Who were the recipients of each program? (e.g., cleaners).

2b). How many women (and men) in each program?

2c). How long did each program run? (e.g., 2hrs pw for 8 weeks).

2d). When did the program run? (e.g., half work time, half own time).

2e). How was each course funded? (e.g., WELL).

Recipients were also asked how the programs were promoted, how people were selected to go on programs and a number of open ended questions related to access and future plans.

A summation of the responses from four workplaces, a dairy, a smallgoods manufacturer, a hospital and the textile industry are recorded below. It should be noted that the first three responses are from Human Resource Management people involved on that specific worksite, while the response for the textile industry came from a representative of the Textile trades and Labour Council and reflects all the literacy programs offered in Perth in that industry. As can be seen from the table, relatively small numbers of women attended the courses listed.

Programs	Masters	Royal Perth	Watsonia	Textile Ind.
No. in 1994	1	3	6	2
Type	ESL	*Intermediate ESL *Combination Course - Introduction Material * Introductory Level 1	ESL but included Products, Health and Safety, Sanitation & Hygiene, Enterprise Agreements	*English for TCF Outworkers *English for TCF Outworkers
Recipients	Process Workers	Cleaners Kitchen Staff	All factory workers	Operators
No. of Women	7	Program 1 = 7 Program 2 = 5 Program 3 = 4	Most recent 15	Program 1 = 7 Program 2 = 5
No. of Men	1	Program 1 = 3 Program 2 = 1 Program 3 = 3	Most recent 17	Program 1 = 2 Program 2 = 0
Length	3 hours x 10 weeks	Program 1 = 22 hours Program 2 = 18 hours Program 3 = 22 hours	Most recent 3 hours x 14 weeks	Program 1 = 5 hours x 10 weeks Program 2 = 4 hours x 5 weeks
Time	In work time	In work time (but because of changing shifts some participants attending in their own time)	Half in work time/ Half in own time	In own time
Funding	WELL	RPH	4 WELL funded 2 FILLIP funded	WELL
Can all attend classes?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Unavailable
Method of Access	Self select/ Peer group	Nominated by Supervisors/Self select	Self select	Self select

Table 1. Program provision in 1994 in four selected industries

Providers

Although interviews with key respondents from course providers are reported in depth later in this report, some comments on the provision of courses for women are appropriate here. The main workplace literacy course providers in Perth are Industry Education Services (IES) and Central Metropolitan College of TAFE (CMC).

Michael Kooperman stated that in 1994 Industry Education Services ran 55 courses in over 30 workplaces. Most of those courses had had WELL or Fillip funding. Up until 1995, IES had only provided courses for NESB people, and contracted out courses for ESBs. In 1995, their brief was extended, and people from English speaking backgrounds who needed to improve their literacy skills were able to be included. The majority of courses operated in male dominated industries such as metal fabrication, the building industry, a local government shire, an abattoir. He also noted that due to downsizing and outsourcing, some government departments that were female dominated and used IES in the past, no longer existed e.g., government cleaners. There was no provision of literacy classes exclusively for women, but several workplaces, mainly in the food industry, had numbers of women attending classes. Most of these have been reported above.

Geoff Pearson indicated that the Workplace Education Unit from CMC had 10-15 programs operating in 1994- early 95. Again, the majority of those were in male dominated industries such as Main Roads, the building industry, Alinta gas and the Water Authority. Some programs, again mainly in the food industry had more female participants. He mentioned a program in the Textile industry for Vietnamese outworkers, which was mostly women. CMC's programs are promoted to NESB and ESB people, men and women alike. He noted that there was no differentiation or discrimination, and it was up to workers to step forward to take the program.

Summary

The preceding information gained from respondents indicates that relatively few workplace literacy courses operated in female dominated industries in 1994 and up until the end of the data collection period, mid 1995. Further, only small numbers of women accessed such classes in other

industries. It also was apparent that when training was totally in work time larger numbers of women attended and there were fewer dropouts.

Reasons for Non-Attendance

Many reasons have been given for nonattendance, both by the women interviewed, and by other key respondents. When interviewing women, it is not possible to be sure that the answers given reflect the real reasons for non participation in literacy courses. For example, women may not wish others to know about their lack of skills. Judith Beetson, a teacher from the Central Metropolitan TAFE indicated that when she is on a worksite, she interviews all prospective course participants, and one thing she sometimes notices is an "attitude swing in the interviews, in which people are embarrassed by their lack of skills". It may be that some people do not want their low skill level to be seen by others, but will state other reasons for not participating. There is no way of knowing whether this is the case for the individuals interviewed.

Evidence from Women's Interviews

A number of common factors emerged from the interviews that indicated why those women failed to access literacy programs. Such factors include:

1. A feeling that they were too old to participate in literacy courses
2. Problems with the time and day on which the course was being held
3. The belief that they did not need the course
4. A lack of interest in the course
5. Time management/ heavy commitment problems
6. Personal / Idiosyncratic reasons (eg. transportation problems)
7. Failure of the course to provide the participants what they needed

A more detailed description of these contributing factors will now be provided, together with examples to support each claim. All the workers' names used are pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the

respondents. To further ensure anonymity in this section, the company names of the respondents' workplaces have not been used. Where key informants have given similar reasons, I have added an example, but I have not identified the informant if that informant works at the same place as the women quoted.

I have used the term *Int* for the Interviewer's questions. when the question was translated into the respondent's own language I have added the letters *Trans*.

Too Old - hard to remember

Many of the women interviewed said that the major reason they did not attend the literacy classes that were provided, was because they felt that they were to old to reap any benefits from such classes. The attitude displayed by a number of women at a small goods factory was that they were simply too old to learn more English, and that it was too difficult to remember new language skills at their age.

I had visited the factory the previous week to explain the study and to ask the women for their cooperation. I returned the following week to conduct the small group interviews.

Int: So, last week when I came down, you were telling me some of the reasons you didn't want to go to classes... so perhaps you can tell me some of things you told me last week - that would be great.

Nona: I don't want to go to school.

Int Trans: Nona, why don't you want to go to school?

Nona: Because I'm too old lady and when I go to school I can't remember. When I be young I must work with small kids - and now I have time but I can't remember - why I know - just wasting time that's all.

Int: You don't need English out in the community? You don't need to speak English?

Nona I need it but I can't remember- just wasting time.

The attitude that they would be wasting their time trying to learn English at their age was reflected in others' comments. Also the notion that you need to be young to learn a language, and that they missed out on that opportunity when they were young themselves.

Int
Trans: What's your reason? Why don't you like to go to school?

Portia: Same your problem. Because you know, much old

Nona: Same as me- you much younger than me. (To the Interviewer - also over 40)

Portia: Much too old. When you pass 40 you're finished. One foot in the grave, one foot in the grave.

This attitude was reflected a little later:

Int: So, you feel it's not really worth it?

Carla: No, really, yeah. It's my daughter like you know, she's ..(unclear), she speak English, she don't need school - young girls 25-30 it's all right. For me, I don't know, it's too late for now.

Portia: It's never too late you learn something.

Carla: Never too late but the point is you don't get time - that's all I do everything - this ...(unclear), 20 years you know, but I tried and never liked it.

Some other respondents said the same thing:

Int: Yes, just why you're not going to the classes?
Marcia: Now I'm not going now too late for us.

Int: Too late?
Carla: I know it's never too late. I live very hard. When we get it before when I, we want to go I never got a chance.

Int: Right, so you would have gone when you were younger?
Carla: I want very much because I would like writing and reading and speaking English very much. And now that's older I get too much worry - you can't go any - it very hard understanding. I go couple of days and still like that - she's given me more homework and coming home I can't do it. After one week I skip it.

This notion was reflected by a respondent at a dairy. This woman had tried courses but gave up when she found she could not remember or do the work.

Carol: But even if I did went, I couldn't go to it in my mind to do that, to, to learn. I didn't think that I can do that and that's what I thought I can learn- it's like Lena, at times, you know, going there ....

Carol: Cause when I think when, when you are younger and when you are a teenager, you know, you learn more than now in my age.

Int: You find it harder?
Carol: I find it very hard, yeah.

Too Old - retiring soon

Another response from some of the women at the small goods factory was that they did not need to learn English as they would be retiring soon. For these women literacy classes were seen as a waste of time and money as they would soon be leaving the work force and thus no longer be requiring such skills.

> Martha: You know its all right for young people .... I'm not 15 years old now - maybe - I don't know maybe tomorrow maybe another two or three years I'm finished, you know.

This feeling was not exclusive to the factory, Hope a cook at an Aged Home and Carol from a dairy, also stated that one of the major reasons that they did not attend literacy classes was because they would be retiring soon:

> Hope: It would be stupid of me to waste everybody's money and time to go onto the course - it would - if it improved my job fair enough - but it wasn't going to improve my job ... It's no good for me to doing these courses now not in my time - I'm way past 50 - who wants to employ you in another job anyway - they don't.

> Carol: You know what I mean, you need every type of experience, you need that but with me I think another couple of years I won't be working you know.

It is important to note that a large proportion of the older woman interviewed said that they would have attended English classes if they had been offered to them, or if they had been able to attend when they were much younger. It appeared that some of these women regretted the fact that they never had, or took advantage of, the opportunity to learn English when they were younger.

Jill: Maybe, if you would just go another couple of years you would learn them more. That's why I left school. That's good for you. A lot of people who have got the chance they don't want it and some people would do anything.

Int: You've been to classes in the past have you?
Jill: No I never did - but I wish I did.

And again:

Adele: It's only thing I miss when I was young like that - I should of go to school

Time/Day of Course

A major problem with the literacy classes held at the small goods factory was that they were conducted on Friday afternoon, partly in the women's own time. Although the women appeared to be happy to take the classes in their own time, the majority of them felt that it would have been better if the classes had of been held earlier on in the week. Furthermore many women would have liked the classes to have been held in the morning (as opposed to an afternoon session) when they were more alert. It was clear from the interviews that by the time Friday afternoon came, the women were extremely tired and just wanted to go home. In addition many of the women's husbands expected them to be home on a Friday afternoon.

Sonia: What they would like to do is have the classes early in the week - that way they've got the rest of the week to be free.

Int: Is it a problem that it's sort of partly in work time and partly in their own time?

Sonia: I don't think it's a problem with that - a lot of the girls are happy to take time even without pay. It's just that right now they just feel that the end of the week they are just too tired and

can't be bothered. We work ten hours a day, six days a week.

Int: So, one of the reasons that Sonia was saying was it was on Friday afternoon. Is that one of the problems? You're tired on Fridays?

Portia: Yeah, it is a problem. I'm the same.

Although I was there to interview women, a small group of men also wanted to talk to me, so I obliged. They wanted me to talk to management and ask them to change the day and time of the class, so it appeared that lessons last thing on Friday afternoon were a problem for both the men and women at the factory. However, while the women stated that they were too tired and had other commitments such as housework and childminding, the men indicated that Friday afternoon was the only time they had to go to the bank.

Don't need it

Another reason why the women interviewed failed to access literacy classes was because many of them felt that there was no need for them to improve their literacy skills, as they could work effectively without improving these skills. Thus the women appeared to be saying that they saw no benefits in attending literacy courses. A number of women from English speaking backgrounds did not want to be interviewed as they said they could speak, read and write English well so did not need to go to classes. I have no way of knowing the standard of their literacy skills, or whether training would benefit them in their jobs. However, it is possible that they were factory workers, working long hard hours, as they do not have the skills to get a better job. It was clear from speaking to the ESB women that they saw workplace literacy courses as acceptable for NESB people, but that they themselves did not want to be identified.

When I was interviewing course providers, they indicated that they often only had one or two ESB women on courses. This was partly due to the WELL and FILLIP guidelines which would eliminate many ESB people as having skills above the stated levels. However, both Michael Kooperman (Industry Education Services) and Geoff Pearson (Workplace Education Unit, CMC, TAFE) indicated that ESB people sometimes did not want to be identified, and that as course providers they tried to overcome this by presenting courses that were integrated with other workplace areas such as Occupational Health and Safety or to name the course so as to make the literacy component less apparent e.g., Computer Skills, Report Writing.

According to one NESB woman there was no need for her to develop better literacy skills as the people she worked with and the people in her community all came from non-English speaking backgrounds and hence all spoke in their own language. Interestingly this particular woman commented that if she had any difficulties at work she could just tell the supervisor (who spoke in her language), rather than having to use English written and verbal communication skills.

Int:	And you don't need it out in the community or at home?
Alana:	No
Int:	Strong community - you all talk in your own language so you don't need English? You don't need English reading?
Alana:	He understands everything, you know - he understand

It is interesting to point out that at the small goods factory there were two main languages spoken, Portuguese and Croatian, and that all the women communicated to the supervisor in one of these two languages. Hence some of them felt that there was no need for them to learn English as they could communicate at work and at home in their native tongue.

I also interviewed a few of the people from the factory who were going to the classes, in order to get other views of the course. Two of these people had a different perspective.

Int: And do you go to classes?
Sheree: I enjoy it - it would help to learn English.

Int: So you need English outside of work?
Sheree: Yes

Int: Do you need it at work very much? Do you need to speak English at work?
Sheree: To speak to bosses - Yeah

Int: To speak to bosses.
Sheree: Bosses and friends.

And again:

Int: And do you find you need it at work or more out in the community?
Elly: Well, actually it's more out in the community, but also we learning a lot of thing about work. Which is before we didn't know much about it, but now this, now they're telling us more.

One of the English background women interviewed at an Aged Home said that she did not feel that she needed to improve her literacy skills as this had no benefits for her in her job. According to this woman she was completely satisfied with her position and as previously mentioned, saw no benefits in accessing literacy classes as they were not relevant to her trade.

Hope: Well, there's nothing to do for me, you know I've got my ticket - so would never want to do anything else - that was pointless in me to do anything else.

It's the same as they have a literacy course here and I found I didn't go because what good is it going to do me. Why waste time and money. Somebody else's time and money, because it wasn't going to do me any good. I mean no-one can tell me my job or show me my job - so I just didn't go .....

I can't see the point in that such a small company - like go and do these courses but there might be six do the course and then it's for no use because - what if I said now, I want to go and change and so something else - I mean I've got to the stage where I want to change anyway.

Time Management / Heavy Commitment Problems

A central factor noted by women interviewed for the non-attendance of literacy courses was the fact that many of them felt they could not arrange their time so as to include English classes. It was found that women had a number of other commitments, such as child care, shopping, cleaning and cooking that prevented them from attending English classes. Common responses to reasons for non-participation follow.

Sonia: You know - you've got a lot of school - I think about it - I have to go home, I have to go shopping, I have to cook, sometimes I look after my grand daughter because my daughter she's working night shift I have to come early and look after her. If I'm going to school I think about so many things, you know. I can't think about school - you see.

Adele: You are trapped in house work, you know, cooking, cleaning, washing - ... I'm really tired.

Portia: Cause Saturday I do a bit of washing, I do cleaning. Saturday I go help my husband. Sunday go my business. Three o'clock home, do cooking washing.

In a recent pamphlet produced by the Women's Policy Development Office it was officially recognised that women are heavily burdened with many commitments:

Women are over-represented in lower-paid, unskilled and part-time jobs and many have trouble getting access to child care. An increasing divorce rate has seen a rise in numbers of lone parent families headed by women. An aging population and an increase in the number of people with intellectual or physical disabilities means a heavier burden of care falling on the shoulders of women

(Women's Policy Development Office Strategic Plan, 1995)

Thus it is clear that women have many other commitments which prevent them from attending English language and literacy classes. It is indisputable, that in many families, men have far less family commitments than women and as a result have the time to attend literacy courses, particularly if they are out of work time. Indeed when asked why it might be easier for men to attend workplace classes than women, one woman at the small goods factory commented:

Nona: Because men - not have much to do. Women - so much to do - must cleaning, washing, cooking, everything. Men come in have dinner and go watch TV, but women have much to do. Men more relaxed, their brains work better.

This heavy family commitment and lack of available time to go to classes is linked to the expectations placed on women from these ethnic cultural backgrounds. The cultural factors and expectations may have inhibited women from attending the free language classes provided for new immigrants by the government. This situation is reflected by the following:

A woman from the small goods factory indicated that she was too busy with small children and then work, when she arrived in Australia and was unable to take advantage of English classes. She also indicated that life is

much easier for young people today and that they are able to take advantage of classes.

Martha: ....(unclear) they come into Australia, my husband six months they are here go work - go work in to work in country - eight months no see husband. Me and two kids stay home, working from here. - see the kids to school - no time because it good for (unclear). Now it's good for the young people, better. For me..(shrugs).

Not interested

Another reason women gave for not attending literacy classes was that they simply were not interested in learning English or improving their literacy. These women often gave other reasons first and when asked if that was all, they then said they were not interested. It is difficult to know whether it is really a lack of interest, whether they simply did not want to be interviewed further, or whether they were covering up the real reason. Two women at the small goods factory and a woman at the Aged Home stated that they were not interested. For example:

Enid: But to be honest with you ... I like to work and do my job and come home

Int: If the classes were all in work time would that make a difference to whether you went or not?

Portia: It probably doesn't make a difference.

Int: So there might be other things as well then? What about you, do you..?

Sonia: No time.

Int: No time?

Portia: Not interested - that's all

Furthermore, Hope an English background chef at an Aged Home said that she was not interested in going to English classes as her life was already

complete, and she simply did not have any time or desire to improve her literacy skills:

Int: Compared to your outside life - not counting your job life - you've got everything?

Hope: Oh yeah - I don't need - I find this is a full time thing and by the time I go home I couldn't be bothered doing anything else anyway. I've got my garden to look after - so, even if I left here tomorrow I could walk into another job because I've go my chefs ticket - you see.

Personal / Idiosyncratic reasons

Throughout the interviews a number of other reasons emerged for the non attendance of women to literacy classes. For example one woman commented that she was embarrassed to attend the classes as they made her feel inferior and unintelligent. Rather than helping her improve herself these classes seemed to have the opposite effect and reduced her self esteem.

Enid: I mean I like to come to work and I like to do my work but I don't have to do courses because I'm very backward and I can't handle them and I get all stressed up and this is the reason ... this is the reason I don't like ...very confused and nervous have always been like that and this is the reason.

Anne Simpson from the Industry Education Services also commented that she too had also had a number of cases where people had dropped out of courses because they found them too stressful.

"... someone did not attend work because of the courses - they found the course quite stressful so rather than tell me or tell the workplace - they kept being absent"

(Anne Simpson, Industry Education Services)

Failure of the course to provide the participants what they needed

Finally, two women complained that the literacy courses they attended in the past had not provided them with skills they required, hence they did not see any point in attending future classes. One of the women at a dairy commented that the classes did not help her understand English. According to this woman she could already read and write, her only problem was that she could not always understand what words meant and the classes did not help her with this.

Carol: I thought I'd try you know, because um, well, with me I can read and I can write but, but, the only problem with me, understand the, you know, the ...

Int : What the actual words mean

Carol: Yeah some words I can't understand what they mean ... but I thought to do this course to understand some sentences, you know that sometimes that they give you a note and you read it and you don't know ...

Int: What it says.

Carol: But with me if I read the first word, then I know what it is all about. Maybe I don't understand the other, er other words, but ...

Int: But you can work it out.

Carol: I can work it out a little bit, you know.

Int: Yes

Carol: I thought it would help me to do but it is very hard to learn those words in an hour, that's why I went to the course, and, and I thought it doesn't help me so that's why I quit. It's no use me going.

Carol and Lena also commented that they thought that the course would help them to learn about issues that were relevant to their job, but to their surprise such issues were not even touched upon.

Carol: I thought it would help me to fill out a forms like those, like those, you, if you injure yourself or ...

Lena: Yeah the injury ones, you know how you get the ...how to fill out, how to fill out if you hurt yourself, how to fill out what time it happened and so on, you know.

Carol: Yeah that's what I thought I was going, if it helps me, you know, to do that ... otherwise it's good to know more, but then like with me that's why I left because I knew, like I said, um, I knew all those things. I can write and read, those things that I can't understand I can never ...(break) there is no use in me to go.

This was not the case at the small goods factory, where a great effort had been made to provide an integrated program that would be useful to the recipients. The following quote is from a course participant.

Elly: It's good for us to know that cause sometimes you work for a long time in this place like in the factories and you don't know what's going on, which now it is good cause we're finding out a lot and at the same time we are learning, you know, we're writing and reading about them, so it's giving us a chance to learn both at the same time.

Evidence from Key Informants - Teachers / HR / Management

Several reasons given by the women, that indicated why they did not access literacy courses, were also recognised by a number of key informants in the field. For example, it was clear from the interviews conducted with teachers and human resource managers that a major factor why women may not access literacy classes is because of the time and day that the courses are held. As previously illustrated, this was also an important factor for some of the women interviewed. In addition it became clear from the interviews

conducted with the key informants, that there were a number of other issues not mentioned by the women interviewed that were seen as contributing to their non-attendance. Contributing factors that emerged from the interviews conducted with key informants are listed below. Although the factors are listed and described separately, it is probable that there is a complex interaction of a number of factors that contribute to women's non-attendance in literacy classes.

1. Problems with the time and day in which the course was being held - includes loss of pay.
2. The impact of cultural background and traditions - includes factors related to being a migrant.
3. Time management/ heavy commitment problems.
4. Age of the women
5. Peer pressure and power groups within the organisation.
6. Suspicion of management and feeling threatened - includes resistance to change.
7. Unrealistic Expectations.

A more detailed description of these contributing factors will now be provided, together with examples and interview extracts, to support each claim.

Time/ Day of Course

A central factor why many of the women interviewed said they did not access literacy classes, was the time and day of the course. The following quote indicates this difficulty is also recognised by the key informants.

> You probably know that with Watsonia it's because it's a Friday afternoon. I think it's the fact that they are women, they have needs, they organise their lives around Friday afternoon so that they can get themselves ready for the weekend - they've got

children ...but some women did say they were interested, but they never went for a similar reason, because it's a Friday afternoon, they can't do it.

(Ruth Burton, Industry Education Service)

There was also an additional problem, for some women, of the classes being held partially in the women's own time, or in some instances solely in their own time. A number of women found it difficult to attend classes out of work time because they have so many other commitments at home.

It's often very difficult, some women have also pushed really hard to go to courses. They would have preferred the course to be taken in company time because they felt that the demands on their time outside of work are just too much, with child care and housework and everything. But it was impossible in terms of costing to do it all in company time. We would have to pay extra casual people to come in and work, it would not have got off the ground - we went for the part time.

(Simone McLachlan-Rees, Watsonia)

This respondent recognised that the day and time that the classes were held was a major reason why many women did not attend literacy classes. She was also aware that the women were quite angry that the classes were partially out of work time, as they had previously been promoted as being totally in work time.

What may have happened also - it was before I joined - the WELL program had been promoted as being totally during work time and then when I joined, and I did the costing and found it wasn't financially possible. We had to go back to the people and say it was only in 50 / 50, and a lot of people got quite angry about that, and quite voluble, they thought they wouldn't be going to go, unless it was totally in the company time.

(Simone McLachlan-Rees)

A similar case was noted by another respondent:

> With Clover Meats we've had enormous problems just getting a program going there. But it was in work time and a lot of people volunteered, and amongst them there were quite a number of women who were interested in either improving their language or literacy skills. What's happened now is we've had to go out of work time, they're being paid, but it doesn't matter. In fact it's after work and they can't access it.
>
> Ruth Burton (IES)

One teacher also said that she had found that many of the women did not attend English courses because they had no way of getting to the classes that were held out of work hours.

> .. one of the conditions at the chicken processing plant is that they come in on their rostered day off. Now a lot of them have made a huge effort to do that but some of them just can't, because the buses don't fit with the class times, or their husbands have already gone to work and they haven't got transport ... often they just can't physically get there.
>
> (Anne Simpson, Industry Education Services)

According to Geoff Pearson from the Workplace Education Unit, Central Metro College of TAFE, the fact that classes are held out of work time or partially out of work time means that women are inadvertently discriminated against. A common thread throughout this report has been the fact that women are burdened with a number of other commitments outside the workplace that prevent them form attending literacy classes. Hence it may be futile to conduct classes outside of working hours, as a number of women simply will not be able to attend such classes.

> ... that will inadvertently discriminate against women because many women time their work so that - so as soon as they have finished work, they go and pick up children from child care centres or relatives or whoever is looking after them. So, inadvertently they get discriminated against through that channel - I know that is definitely true...

(Geoff Pearson, Workplace Education Unit, Central Metro TAFE)

On the whole it appears that many women are interested in attending literacy courses, but simply can not attend them out of work time. In fact Di McAtee emphasised that from her experience, most women will access classes if they are within working hours.

> They are interested but it has to be within work hours and then the factory, you know, then they say look we can't afford to take people off line during work hours. You know, if they are really committed, they'll do something at the weekend or after hours. But that is an impossibility. But you talk to the women, you ask the right questions - "Do you want the English language literacy training?" and they say "Yes". "Can you do it after work hours or can you come in early or stay a bit late?"- and again the answer is a no.
>
> (Di McAtee, Trades and Labour Council)

A somewhat related issue was the fact that some of the women did not want to access literacy classes because it impacted on their income. The following quote is related to the situation at one factory where classes were held twice a week at the end of the day, which meant that the women missed out on over-time twice a week.

> So she was losing out on over-time twice a week. And she just couldn't - she had to have the money ... Another person, was finding that not having the over-time which always comes at the end of the day, which is when our classes were, was actually dramatically effecting how much she really needed to survive.
>
> (Anne Simpson, Industry Education Services)

As well as the above factors which would affect most women, the impact of cultural traditions may make the time and day of the course even more important for non-English speaking background women, as there may be expectations that they will come straight home from work, and have full responsibility for running the household.

The Impact of Cultural Background and Traditions

An interesting outcome from these interviews was that it appeareed that some women failed to access literacy classes because of their cultural background. A number of women came from cultures where it was seen as inappropriate for them to attend literacy courses. In such cultures it was expected that the women came home straight from work to clean the house, look after the children and have the family meal prepared for when their husband came home. It may be, however, that a combination of low levels of education and cultural background are involved. As I did not investigate education levels, I am not able to isolate this factor, I am simply reporting statements made to me by key informants.

> Friday afternoon is difficult looking at women who culturally need to be at home or want to be home with their children. Their husbands might demand them to come straight away - to be home
>
> (Michael Kooperman, Industry Education Service)

> No doubt, you know also if they were having them in the afternoon, after work time - then there is still a very strong sense in some cultures that the women must be home. The women still do most of the home work at home, the housework and the food must be ready when her husband comes back.
>
> (Anne Simpson, Industry Education Services)

Another respondent indicated that there is a strong belief amongst some groups that they do not need literacy skills, as such skills are only relevant to men, or that women are expected to be at home.

> The men do not always like the women taking on courses because they're just to do the basic work, in the factory, and then, you know come home ... you know it's not considered right for them to take up, it's alright for men to take up extra time outside work hours with work issues but not women. In those communities you find that's a very strong factor.
>
> (Di McAtee, Trades and Labour Council)

Cultural Traditions - Factors related to being a migrant

While ethnic cultural background and traditions may impact on women who were born in Australia, those who came here as migrants have added problems. Although the federal government provides free tuition in the English language, many older women were unable to access this entitlement in the time allowed. One female worker who was interviewed had indicated that this was the case for her. It was her perception that it was easier for today's migrants. A key respondent, Maria Vujcic indicated that she thought the situation has not changed.

> For the women I can see them repeating a pattern. When my mother came out here, the language was a major barrier to getting any sort of job that matched her intellectual ability. I can see a section of women coming through now from the former Yugoslavia who will repeat that pattern.

I asked if was difficult for these women to access English language classes when they first arrive.

> Yes. You can think of it, they will fall into that classic migrant pattern of, first priority is get yourself established, so not going out there to find out what's best for me in terms of - you know my quality of life.
>
> What I'm concerned about is that we're in the 1990s, and certainly in a few short years is the 21st century, and I'm seeing patterns emerging that were around in my mother's generation 30 years ago. I think they can get lost because we're not looking for them in the 1990s.
>
> (Maria Vujcic, North Perth Migrant Resource Centre)

Another key informant believed that many migrant women did not know what was available or how to access it when they arrived in Australia.

> They could have gone to TAFE, but a lot of them physically don't have the organisational skills. I mean, never mind the problems of the time, and the problems of the working mother and all that, but simply their actual organisational skill of getting themselves down to a TAFE... office. Actually learning what courses are available, and then actually going ahead and booking in. We take so much for granted, there is so much unconscious knowledge.
>
> (Anne Simpson, Industry Education Services)

Time Management/Heavy Commitment Problems

Also linked to the cultural background and traditions, was the fact that the women had little free time available to include English/literacy classes. It was clear from the interviews that child care and family commitments were major barriers which prevented many women from attending classes.

> They're (*women*) expected to do everything at home
>
> (Di McAtee, Trades & Labour council)

> Then I think issues like family commitments are important
>
> Ruth Burton (IES)

> Also there are a lot of women who take a lot of pride in their homes and they actually want their homes to look nice. They're proud of them, the cleaning and the things like that are some things that they never, very few of them, actually complain about it. They say they get very tired, but there is never a question of them not doing any of it.
>
> (Anne Simpson, IES)

Related to commitment problems is the stress of working full time, keeping house and caring for a family.

> One of the reasons was that a woman was just having too many personal dramas at home. She just couldn't cope ... a

troublesome teenager and she just could not cope with the course and that.

(Anne Simpson IES)

Peer Pressure and Power Groups within the Organisation or Industry

It became apparent after speaking to both Michael Kooperman, from the Industry Education Service, and Simone McLachlan-Rees, a Personnel Manager at Watsonia, that power plays operating within the work place could prevent women from attending literacy classes.

Michael Kooperman commented that he believed that many of the women felt pressured by their peers not to attend the classes, as they would be seen as traitors, or working in with management. It was clear that when there were strong leaders in a workplace they had the power to influence the women's decision as to whether they would attend literacy classes.

> There is actually a very large group of people who nominated for the first course last year, then at the last minute, it was actually the day courses started, withdrew. It is very interesting because we have power groups within the departments and that particular group of women who withdrew all came from one power grouping, and it was a person who influenced them, she was the trade union rep. She was very negative about the changes to do with enterprise bargaining and whether it was at her instigation, I don't know just what it was, but there was a considerable amount of negative feeling. They didn't want to participate, and haven't participated this year either.
>
> (Simone McLachlan-Rees)

A further problem is noted in the following quote: "but that's another reason, there can be personality clashes between the teacher and the student, between student and student" (Michael Kooperman). As a result several women did not attend literacy classes as they did not feel comfortable with their peers or the teacher.

Suspicion of management and feelings that their job might be in danger if they attend.

While the women interviewed failed to state that one of the factors why they did not access literacy classes was because of suspicion of management or that they felt that their jobs might be in danger, it was clear from the interviews conducted with the key informants that this was seen as an important contributing factor in some workplaces. It was apparent that some of the women would not talk to the interviewer because they thought she was either linked in some way to management or sent by management to check on them. Simone McLachlan-Rees made it very clear that the women were extremely unwilling to speak to any "outsiders" as they viewed them with much suspicion.

> It's suspicion of - it's actually very difficult unless a person actually has worked here for a while. Many women, particularly the ones - the people who are in the lower level of language, I think feel very threatened and what you find is that anything you say is viewed with suspicion. Any moves from management or HR, are viewed suspiciously. They are not yet settled down and secure with all the changes that have taken place. Enterprise agreement has come into place - there are some changes in pay, changes in classification and structures - people are being asked to rotate - and there has always been a mentality that this is my job for life. There are a whole lot of status issues involved, so people are feeling very insecure, and I do find that they tend to be very suspicious of anything coming from anywhere because there is a tendency for things to be viewed as management trying to get in see how they think and feel. It might be totally over reactive.
>
> (Simone McLachlan-Rees, Watsonia)

After speaking to a number of teachers and key informants, it was apparent that suspicion of management and feeling threatened was a common reason why women fail to access literacy classes. This is not surprising in the

current workplace climate of economic rationalism, workplace restructuring and downsizing. As noted earlier, negotiating change in the workplace can be difficult. Workers are often afraid of losing their jobs. Any activity that might indicate they lack the necessary skills for the new demands of their workplace may make them feel that their positions could be in jeopardy.

I was unable to gain access to workers on several sites because management did not want to make workers feel more threatened they already were.
At Watsonia, the personnel manager was well aware of women's fears and took steps to allay them. In that particular workplace management recognised their responsibility to provide whatever training was necessary in order for employees to cope with the changes. The literacy courses not only were integrated with workplace training, they were used to explain the changes going on.

> We have introduced new work methods and trials and people don't always understand why they have been asked to do things differently.
>
> It was actually quite an eye opener. For so many years, people only just had enough English to get by in what they were currently doing. With the changes envisaged, in the factory with career paths, there is going to be progression, people going to different jobs, job rotation is coming into place, multiskilling - we want to put proper structured training in place.. and it was quite apparent that people weren't going to be able to cope with those changes. Even cope with changes in their current job, much less accessing anything more than that.
>
> We focused on a lot of areas during the course of the lessons. To extend the employees' work vocabulary, and we were also going through enterprise bargaining at the time, and there were a lot of women who didn't understand. So we used the lessons for some of management to talk to employees explaining enterprise bargaining. We had someone from Occ Health and Safety to come in and expand on her role in that, someone from Product Development talked about her work and someone from Quality Control talked

about sanitation and hygiene control. Myself and the HR and IR manager explained things like enterprise agreements.

(Simone McLachlan-Rees, Watsonia)

Women who did not access the classes may have missed out on more than improved literacy skills, if they had to rely on feedback from participants, or written documents to find out where they stood in relation to enterprise agreements and other workplace changes.

A less common, but related factor, occurred at some sites, where a particular supervisor inhibited women from accessing courses. Some of the teachers commented that some of the women were intimidated by their supervisors to such an extent, that they were too scared to attend classes even though they were interested in them. Several women were also told by their supervisors production would suffer, if they took time out to attend literacy courses, for example:

The women on the course are very keen to learn, it's that sometimes you have hassles releasing them, because of the pressures of work from the supervisors.

(A teacher from the Industry Education Services)

The other thing is when the workplace does not want to release them because of production constraints - that's a very major issue.

(Anne Simpson, Industry Education Services)

Other respondents noted that a unique problem faced by women is the fact they some are reluctant to stand up to management and fight for their rights. This again is probably linked to cultural traditions in which it is more common for men to challenge the system. Thus it appears that many of the women won't access courses because they are too scared to approach management and say they want to attend.

With women they will not challenge the system they go along more easily. So though - I mean it can vary on an individual basis,

and they'll say "no we're going", but there'll be those who'll be intimidated and feel that their job might be at risk and (unclear).. Whereas a man might actually - a male might see it through...

(Ruth Burton, Industry Education Service)

The following example indicates just how difficult it is for some ethnic women to approach management concerning their needs.

Yes, I had one of the Vietnamese women in yesterday and she was telling me some quite horrific things that, you know, the sensitivities and the modesties perhaps that some of the women have, they don't like to say at the time - leave them alone to go to the toilet. Particularly, if it's a male supervisor. So what these women are doing is not drinking during the day. So, that situation doesn't have to arise. That's horrific, from the health and safety point of view. And they go home and drink gallons and gallons of water. And that's a lack of understanding. What the sensitivities are... and a lot of production lines are just insensitive ... and with a group of women who - South East Asian women who ... traditionally, don't stand up for their rights.

(Di McAtee, Trades and Labour Council)

If these women, because of their cultural background, modesty, lack of English language, unfamiliarity with their rights as workers, or other reasons, fail to ask for such a basic necessity as a toilet break, they are unlikely to ask for the right to attend literacy classes.

Some respondents also recalled cases where management used literacy programs to screen out employees who could not speak English. Hence it appears that the women's fears concerning the security of their jobs may not be without substance. In fact one respondent stated that many people were concerned that English literacy classes would expose their failings to management and in turn prevent them from being promoted to other positions or even retaining their current position.

Also you know reading and writing skills were never a criteria for getting a job ... especially the sort of workers that you're looking at - and all of a sudden then the employer comes up with an idea that

now your looking at reading and writing skills - people might feel that it's going to be used against somebody in regards to an appointment ... a lot of people are going to feel a little well, threatened - well "if I admit that I can't read and write is that going to be taken against me in regard to employment?" There was another instance, where it was a private sector organisation about 1986 I think, and they asked us to do a needs assessment and write up a report on consideration of our own courses. We did everything and at that time it was a free service because of Commonwealth funding. We did everything up to the final report and presented it and we didn't hear anything back from that organisation, and when that happens - I get a sense of them using the information for a motive. So one day I just happened to meet one of these employees in the street and he said "Oh, yes - there were a number of us retrenched" and I thought you know maybe they were retrenched on the information that we gave them because the employee took the language and reading, writing as a part of their employment, and it was the, actual - it was the employment officer - that actually invited us in to do it. And this is why sometimes I feel reluctant - I like to see things in writing - saying "yes - we'll go through with it" , but again who knows. This information can be used against anyone and I think this is why a lot of people don't want to be part of an assessment or an assessment evaluation process because the information can be used against them.

(Michael Kooperman, Industry Education Service)

Although he thought it was not a major factor, Geoff Pearson also noted an incident in the past which has influenced present practice so that sackings don't occur following literacy testing .

In our unit they, we ask them, each workplace we go into, to sign a statement of confidentiality, which is binding, not to disclose any information about workers abilities because of this very issue. And in the past that was definitely true - the testing that we did was suddenly used for sackings and so we had to stop that. That's why we work on a voluntary basis and that question does come up from workers that say that once they know - "am I in trouble?" So we

have to assure people that that won't be the case. That has not been the case to my knowledge .

(Geoff Pearson, Workplace Ed Unit, Central Metro TAFE)

It is a complex issue, and the relationship between management and the workers is often strained in the current climate of change. While the present procedures of course providers ensure confidentiality of each person's individual literacy assessment, their fears may not be totally unfounded, as management knows who attends literacy courses, and if increases in productivity, or enhanced work skills are not apparent at the completion of the course, those people may be targeted when cuts are necessary.

Unrealistic Expectations

As previously reported, two of the women interviewed noted that the course they had attended in the past had not provided the language and literacy skills they felt they needed. Some key respondents noted that in the past some courses had been run as basic English language courses without regard to the needs for specific workplaces. However, they stated that this is not usually the case with present courses, as a huge effort is expended to ensure that individual and company needs are met. Many of the workplace literacy courses provided are integrated with Occupational Health and Safety, enterprise bargaining requirements or other workplace oriented tasks. For example, at Watsonia as well as those areas mentioned, they were working towards presenting the generic modules of the Food Processing Certificate.

One respondent noted that sometimes the participants had unrealistic expectations of the rate at their skills would improve if they took a course.

The reality does dawn on how long it takes to improve skills. People have a quick fix notion, they drop out. *(..when they realise that they have not improved very much).* After 60 hours they are not likely to be much better.

(Judith Beetson, CMC TAFE)

While the above discussion presents quotes from key respondents related to reasons women may not access workplace literacy courses that are available to them, almost all respondents said that the majority of women did access

available classes. They also noted that when women made a commitment to a course, they usually stayed with it until the end. Several respondents indicated that in their experience, women were often less likely to leave a course than men.

Even so the above factors are all related to reasons seen by key informants why some women may not access workplace literacy courses when they are available. The reasons may be complex and interlinked. While some factors, such as fear of management motives, may equally affect men, others seem to have a greater effect on women. These are time and day of the course, heavy time commitments and cultural background. Further, culture (and probably educational level) affects ethnic women in regard to considering themselves too old to learn, and being migrant women they may not have had the opportunity to learn English when they were younger. All of these factors may act to marginalise some women.

Marginalisation of Women with low English literacy skills

An interview conducted with the manager of a local cleaning company is indicative of how the changes to workplaces is acting to marginalise women with low literacy skills. The women who are marginalised are often older women, of ethnic origin and speak English as a second or other language.

The cleaning company employs approximately 50 women and thirty men. The cleaners who work for the cleaning company clean a variety of commercial premises ranging from banks, offices, and pharmaceutical companies to a pigment plant. The cleaners mostly are employed on a casual basis and either work in the evenings or early mornings. This particular company only employs a few people who speak English as a second or other language.

> We have to be careful because a lot of the jobs are just one person jobs. I think you'll find that bigger cleaning companies allow to maybe employ 20 to 30 people on one site. They may well employ people whose grasp of the English l language is not as good..... because they can always refer

to an on site cleaning hand - so that's why we're very careful that - you know because of workers comp, public liability and all that you know they've got to basic grasp of speaking and reading English just for their own safety mainly.

Next I asked about the criteria for employment with the company.

Well I suppose they have got to present reasonably well - look neat and tidy - you know, be able to fill out the application forms - have experience in commercial cleaning, they don't have to perhaps, have necessarily done high speed polishing, which is a requirement of some jobs . If they need to do that we'll, you know, we would train them. But most of the work is fairly straight forward. We also look for people who of - they usually must have a car because some of our jobs are hard to get to. If you rely on public transport you just can't get there. We like them to have a phone on at home so that we can contact them easily, and that's their - or usually, we ask for a police clearance - and they don't have a history of workers compensation claims.

Next I asked if there was a literacy requirement for employment.

Oh yes - because we are a quality assured company - they do have - documentation actually on the work site that they have to fill out. Like there's a cleaners detail and if the staff write in a special request, or complaint, they have to be able to read that - carry out the work that they have been ask to do and then write a response. So they have to be able to do that.
They also need to be able to read that this bottle's got glass cleaner, this bottle is toilet acid, this bottle is spray and wipe - you know things like that. I mean they don't have to be Rhodes scholars by any means - and I mean some of our cleaners speak with quite heavy accents but you know you'll find that they can still - sort of read and write well enough to get by on.

(Manager Private Cleaning Company)

I asked the manager if they would be prepared to offer language or literacy courses if their employees needed it.

> We just feel that we really just haven't got the facilities to - facilities for them really so you know we have to be fairly selective really.
> Well its a small company and we're not able to offer any sort of language help for them.
> There's probably a number of things that you know that we'd like to do - but I'll think you'll find that just the basic overhead of running the company you really can't afford - you just basically can't afford to do something like helping our cleaners with any language problems - I mean we'd quite like to do it but the budget just doesn't stretch that far - so that's basically what it boils down to I think.
>
> (Manager Private Cleaning Company)

Cleaners in the government sector have also had problems as the following quote indicates.

> There's going to be huge changes in regard to who's going to have the benefit of our program because most of the changes are coming from the Government sector where a lot of people are being made redundant. A good example of that is the BMA. They had maybe 30 cleaners, female cleaners on our courses- now those female cleaners were made redundant. Now they (BMA) have private contracting which means with the BMA we probably won't be doing much work in there ever again, and the same things are going to happen with TAFE - they are looking at putting their cleaning out to contract as well, and they're mostly female as well.
>
> (Michael Kooperman, Industry Education Services)

As indicated by the interview with the Manager of a private cleaning company, these companies often do not have the resources to provide literacy training, so screen out those requiring such training at the interview

stage. As Michael Kooperman noted, "The people who have been made redundant, they will be marginalised- the thing is, that it's very hard to track where these people are going".

The above comments reflect findings from several government reports that indicated that when downsizing and outsourcing occurs, it is often the NESB migrant workers who are the first to go. This is because they are concentrated in the lower skilled jobs. It is often NESB women who are in the lowest skilled jobs such as cleaning, who are affected the most (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Brisbane, 1992; Jamrozic, Boland & Stewart, 1991; Labour Market Research Centre, WA, 1993).

Conclusion

In recent years there has been growing concern about the literacy skills of Australians in the work place. It has become evident that a number of people, not only non-English speaking background (NESB) people, lack sufficient language and literacy skills to cope with the changing demands of the nineties' workplace. These workers tend to be relegated to lower-paid, unskilled and part-time jobs, but even these jobs often now require literacy skills. Further, with the move to competency based assessment and training in the workplace, increased literacy demands will be placed on all levels of employees. Many workers do not have the literacy skills to met those demands. In an attempt to rectify this situation, government funding has been provided and a large number of literacy programs have been developed to enable those workers to increase their workplace literacy and communication skills.

In a recent a National study conducted by Pearson and Strickland (1993), only small numbers of women were noted in literacy courses. It was beyond the bounds of that study to investigate why women did not attend classes. They also noted that there were few female dominated workplaces with literacy programs, in the sites studied.

Thus the purpose of the current study was to gauge the extent of provision in WA, and examine the reasons why some women fail to access literacy classes, when they are available. It has been suggested (McDonald, 1993) that

women have unequal access to literacy courses because they face a number of other barriers that prevent them from attending classes. According to this report such barriers include the timing of the classes, whether they are in the workers' time and the attitude of management. However to this end no empirical study in Western Australia has been conducted to assess the reasons why women fail to attend literacy courses.

The present study investigated issues relating to women's access to workplace literacy programs in several worksites that had numbers of women. In particular this study aimed to: investigate the availability of literacy skills programs for women in industries which are typically female-dominated; ascertain whether women are accessing programs when they are available; and uncover the factors which are related to non participation of women in specific industries where programs are available.

In relation to the first aim, it was found that there are far fewer literacy programs available in workplaces with large numbers of women, than offered in male dominated workplaces. This finding adds some clarity to Pearson and Strickland's study as they could not offer any explanation as to whether low availability of literacy programs for women was due to the fact that there were very few available or because the nominated cases of good practice they studied, mostly came from male dominated industries. The fact that this study specifically targeted female dominated industries provides compelling evidence to suggest that in 1994-95 there were very few literacy or communication skills programs available in female dominated industries in Western Australia.

This is of some concern as it has previously been noted that literacy skills have become a necessity in the Australian workplace. With the introduction of Workplace Agreements and Enterprise Bargaining it is now essential that all workers possess adequate reading, writing and numerical skills. While some workplaces are providing the necessary training, other workplaces, particularly, smaller, privately owned businesses, screen workers out who do not have the required levels of oral English or literacy.

In terms of the second aim, as to whether women are indeed accessing programs when they are available, it was found that women are often very

keen to attend literacy courses provided that they are in the company's time and that they do not interfere with family commitments. In addition it was also found that there is a very low drop out rate of women from literacy courses. It appears that women usually will make a commitment to complete the course once they have signed up. However there were a number of women interviewed who did not want to attend literacy classes.

This leads into the third aim of the present study which was to uncover the factors which are related to non participation of women in specific industries where programs are available. No previous study had been conducted which specifically examined factors that contribute to the non participation of women in workplace literacy courses in industries which had large numbers of women in Western Australia. From the interviews conducted with women working in a variety of industries and from the interviews conducted with the key informants it was found that there were specific contributing factors why women failed to access literacy classes made available to them. These factors were as follows:

1. A feeling that they are too old to participate in literacy courses
2. Problems with the time and day of the course
3. Time management / heavy commitment problems
4. Suspicion of management/feeling threatened
5. Peer pressure and power groups within the organisation
6. Cultural traditions
7. The belief that they do not need the course
8. A lack of interest in the course
9. Personal / Idiosyncratic reasons (eg. stress)

The results of this study are in conjunction with those obtained by MacDonald (1993) in that her research also identified family commitments and peer pressure as being major contributing factors for the non-attendance of women in workplace literacy programs. However, a number of other factors were also found in this study that contribute to women's non-attendance. For women from English speaking backgrounds the main reason given tended to be that they did not need it. They tended to see literacy courses as only being relevant for NESB women. It could well be that they did not want to be identified as needing to improve their literacy

skills. Providers were aware of this fact and have begun to offer more courses that are integrated with workplace training such as Occupational Health and Safety, or are named so as to make it less obvious that they include a literacy component, e.g., Report Writing, Computer skills.

The other reason given by women from English speaking backgrounds was that they were close to retiring age and it would be a waste of time. This reason was also commonly given by NESB women. However, it was noted that NESB women felt that they were too old from about the age of 40. They also indicated that they felt it was too hard to learn another language at their age. This image of themselves as old seemed to be culturally bound. Other factors that were influenced by cultural background were the heavy home and family commitments of the NESB women and finding it difficult to access classes that were held out of work time.

The present industrial changes have had an impact on women's access to classes as many women, especially NESB women do not understand the changes or why they are necessary, and are suspicious of management motives. These suspicions and feelings that their jobs might be in jeopardy may cause some women not to access classes.

Further, it appeared that older NESB women may be the worst off in the current workplace world. They feel they are too old to benefit from training, and that they have not been able to take advantage of past opportunities. Many female cleaners in government departments have lost their jobs due to outsourcing and private cleaning companies tend to screen out those with low language and literacy levels. It appears that the older NESB women who have poor English proficiency and the lowest skills are being marginalised even further in the current economic climate in this country.

In conclusion, it appeared that at the time of this study, there were not many workplace literacy courses operating in workplaces that had a majority of women. Providers indicated that they do not discriminate, but simply market their services to workplaces that are likely to have employees who need to increase their literacy skills. It appeared that the majority of their current clientele come from male dominated workplaces. It is not clear from this study why that was the case.

It was apparent from interviews with teachers that when women were offered the opportunity to take workplace literacy courses they were keen to attend, and that once they had made a commitment usually stayed until the end of the course. From the interviews with women who had not taken or had dropped out of courses, it appeared that there were a number of barriers that may prevent some women from accessing courses. **A course that ran after work hours, being over forty, expectations arising from certain cultural backgrounds and the effect of power groups within the workplace appeared to be the main barriers for the women in this study. Some of these barriers may not be faced by men, and the barriers appeared worse for NESB women.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. More female dominated industries need to be targeted, and women within male dominated and other industries need to be targeted for workplace literacy courses.

Workplaces, Governments and Providers need to be aware that the majority of workplace literacy courses in W.A., operate in male dominated workplaces.

2. Providers and Managers should endeavour to hold workplace literacy classes totally within work hours if at all possible.

Workplaces, Governments and Providers need to be aware that some women may not be able to access and participate in workplace language and literacy courses due to a combination of factors, the most important being whether or not the course is held in work hours, and the heavy commitment of working full time and caring for a family.

3. Providers need to stress to prospective clients that the integrated literacy skills they gain, will be used on the job, thus providing ongoing practise and so they will be retained.

Some NESB women feel that they are too old after about 40 years to learn any more language skills. Examples of successful older clients should be given to prospective clients.

4. Providers and Management need to be aware of, and find ways to deal with cultural factors and power groups which may act to deter women from accessing courses.

5. Workplace Managers need to be able to reassure workers, that those identified by a literacy audit as requiring further skills, will not be victimised or retrenched as a result.

6. Workplaces need to make a commitment to workplace literacy courses.
Workplaces need to show a commitment to ongoing workplace training for all workers. For people who need to increase literacy skills, Managers need to be aware that this is a long term prospect and that one short course will not be sufficient.

7. Special retraining and literacy skills programs for recently retrenched women need to be implemented.
Governments need to recognise that NESB women in low-skilled jobs are being marginalised by current restructuring and downsizing, and that this will have a negative effect on low income families.

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